

Juveniles are over-represented among proven false confessions, and adolescents are at elevated risk of false confession relative to adults -- a dispositional vulnerability (immaturity of judgment, suggestibility, and compliance with authority) that interacts with situational interrogation pressure. The claim concerns the composition of known and proven cases and comparative risk, not a known absolute rate among all juvenile confessions.

Evidence strength: Moderate

Scientific consensus: Established

BOTTOM LINE

There is general acceptance among confession researchers -- quantified at roughly 80% or higher agreement in expert surveys -- that youth is a risk factor for false confession and that juveniles are over-represented among proven false confessions. What is debated is the magnitude and the true (unknowable) base rate, not the direction of the effect.

WHAT THIS CLAIM DOES NOT SAY

- Does not assert a known population base rate -- over-representation is established within proven/known false confessions and exonerations; the rate among all juvenile confessions is unknown and likely unknowable.
- Does not claim that any particular juvenile confession is false -- this is a group-level, probabilistic risk factor, not an individual diagnostic.
- Does not isolate youth from co-occurring vulnerabilities -- intellectual disability, mental illness, and ADHD elevate risk and co-occur with youth; age's independent contribution is supported but must not be overstated against these correlated factors.
- Does not claim that most juveniles will falsely confess -- false confession remains the exception; the claim is comparative (higher than adults), not absolute.
- Does not establish that a specific technique caused a specific confession -- situational factors (length, false-evidence ploy, minimization) interact with dispositional youth, and individual-case causation requires case-specific analysis.
- Does not speak to ultimate guilt -- it bears on the reliability of confession evidence, not on whether the defendant did the act.

SCOPE — WHERE IT HOLDS

Grounded in proven/exoneration case samples (where the confession is established as false) and in juvenile-versus-adult comparisons from experiments and surveys. It is a dispositional-by-situational account: youth raises baseline vulnerability, which interacts with interrogation tactics (length, false-evidence ploy, minimization).

It describes group-level composition and comparative risk, not the truth of any individual confession, and not an absolute population base rate -- the denominator of all juvenile confessions is unknown and likely unknowable.

EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS

Multiple independent streams converge on the conclusion that juveniles are over-represented among proven false confessions and are at elevated risk relative to adults. Archival analyses of proven false confessions (Drizin & Leo 2004; National Registry of Exonerations) find juveniles substantially over-represented among documented wrongful-conviction confessions. Controlled experiments show younger and more suggestible participants are more likely to falsely take responsibility for acts they did not commit, especially when confronted with false evidence (Redlich & Goodman 2003). Developmental reviews explain why -- immaturity of judgment, heightened suggestibility, and compliance with authority -- and warn that adult-designed interrogation tactics are especially hazardous with minors (Owen-Kostelnik et al. 2006). The leading scientific synthesis treats youth as an established dispositional risk factor that interacts with situational interrogation pressure (Kassin et al. 2010), and expert-acceptance surveys quantify broad agreement on the point (Kassin et al. 2018). The Supreme Court's recognition in J.D.B. that a child's age objectively shapes the interrogation experience is adjacent to, though not a holding on, false-confession reliability.

STUDIES (VERIFIED SOURCES)

SEMINAL

Drizin, S. A., & Leo, R. A (2004). The problem of false confessions in the post-DNA world. North Carolina Law Review, 82, 891-1007.

Observational · N = 125 · proven false-confession cases (incl. juveniles)

Archival analysis of 125 proven false confessions: juveniles substantially over-represented among documented wrongful-conviction confessions.

SUPPORTING

Kassin, S. M., Drizin, S. A., Grisso, T., Gudjonsson, G. H., Leo, R. A., & Redlich, A. D (2010). Police-induced confessions: Risk factors and recommendations. *Law and Human Behavior*, 34(1), 3-38.

Review · research synthesis · doi.org/10.1007/s10979-009-9188-6

AP-LS scientific white paper: youth is an established dispositional risk factor for false confession that interacts with situational interrogation tactics.

Redlich, A. D., & Goodman, G. S (2003). Taking responsibility for an act not committed: The influence of age and suggestibility. *Law and Human Behavior*, 27(2), 141-156.

Experimental · 12-13, 15-16, young adults · doi.org/10.1023/A:1022543012851

Experimental: younger and more suggestible participants more likely to falsely take responsibility, especially when shown false evidence (age x suggestibility).

Owen-Kostelnik, J., Reppucci, N. D., & Meyer, J. R (2006). Testimony and interrogation of minors: Assumptions about maturity and morality. *American Psychologist*, 61(4), 286-304.

Review · doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.4.286

Developmental review of why youth heightens suggestibility and compliance, and why adult interrogation tactics are hazardous with minors.

National Registry of Exonerations. National Registry of Exonerations -- false confessions among exonerees, by age. National Registry of Exonerations (University of California Irvine / University of Michigan / Michigan State University).

Observational · exonerees (juvenile and adult)

Exoneration dataset: roughly 12% of exonerees gave false confessions, with juveniles markedly elevated relative to adults (real-world corroboration).

Kassin, S. M., Redlich, A. D., Alceste, F., & Luke, T. J (2018). On the general acceptance of confessions research: Opinions of the scientific community. *American Psychologist*, 73(1), 63-80.

Observational · N = 87 · expert survey (n=87) · doi.org/10.1037/amp0000141

Expert survey (n=87): at least 80% agreement among confession researchers, quantifying general acceptance that youth elevates false-confession risk (Daubert/Frye).

Mogavero, M. C (2020). An exploratory examination of intellectual disability and mental illness associated with alleged false confessions. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 38(4), 299-316.

Observational · N = 2378 · exonerees (juvenile and adult) · doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2463

Peer-reviewed analysis of National Registry felony exoneration data (~2,378 cases): false confession more likely among juveniles, those with mental illness, and those with intellectual disability -- corroborates the registry figure and the youth/co-occurring-vulnerability caution in guardrail #3.

LIMITATIONS

The central over-representation finding is drawn from proven/known false confessions and exonerations, so the true base rate among all juvenile confessions cannot be computed -- the denominator is unknown. Experimental paradigms that establish causation trade ecological validity for control (low-stakes acts cannot ethically replicate real interrogations). Youth co-occurs with intellectual disability, mental illness, and ADHD, which independently raise risk,

so age's separate contribution must not be overstated. Samples are largely U.S.-based, and exoneration datasets reflect cases that were discovered and overturned, not a random sample.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

(1) That a detailed or confident confession by a juvenile is reliable -- youth raises the risk of false or compliant confessions. (2) That over-representation means most juveniles falsely confess -- false confession is the exception; the claim is comparative. (3) That the science can label a specific confession false -- it identifies elevated group-level risk, not individual ground truth.

EXPERT WITNESS NOTES

Use to establish that youth is a generally-accepted, established risk factor for false confession and that juveniles are over-represented among proven false confessions -- supporting heightened scrutiny of a juvenile confession's reliability. Anchor to the archival data, the experimental work, and the expert-acceptance surveys (useful for a Daubert/Frye general-acceptance showing). Be candid on cross that there is no known base rate, that experiments are low-stakes analogues, and that youth co-occurs with other vulnerabilities -- so the testimony establishes elevated risk and the need for case-specific analysis, not that this particular confession was false. Frame youth as one dispositional factor interacting with the specific interrogation tactics used.

LEGAL MAPPING

RELEVANT TO

J.D.B. v. North Carolina — 564 U.S. 261 (2011)